

EVALUATION OF SPONSORED PROJECT OFFICES AT PRIMARILY
UNDERGRADUATE INSTITUTIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by
Jason Cottam

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Abstract

Institutions of higher education who perform research functions perform an immensely important and vital service to society and to the pursuit of new knowledge. Institutions of higher education take many forms from small primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs) whose mission is primarily that of instruction and academic pursuits to larger institutions whose focus is primarily on research and the discovery of new knowledge and solving the world's biggest problems. However, these norms are not set in stone and research is fluid enough to allow even small undergraduate institutions to conduct research.

In 1988, Sharon Davis conducted a study to understand the conduct of research at PUIs. The study's aim was to understand how and if sponsored project offices at these PUIs have the capacity and the investment needed to fully support research. The study concluded that management at PUIs have interest in conducting research at their institutions, however, Davis concluded that more investment is warranted in research support functions at PUIs to support the growth of the research function at these types of institutions. It has been 30 years since Davis' study and the question remains as to whether or not PUIs investment in research support functions has improved. In conducting the survey based on similar survey questions from the 1988 survey, it appears that, in general, staffing size has increased, but investment in terms of annual budget size has decreased. This affect, however, has not led to any appreciable gains in output of these sponsored project offices at PUIs in terms of active grants administered and annual proposals submitted.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Higher education institutions are facing difficulties currently with declining enrollments, high cost of attending school and a general public that is increasingly questioning the merits of higher education when conducting a cost-benefit analysis of debt assumed versus wages received with a college degree. Because of these realities, many smaller institutions whose primary mission is that of instruction known as primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs) are seeking additional revenue streams to diversify the revenue that PUIs bring in to support their operational needs. Many PUIs do not possess large endowments to carry them through rocky financial times. The endowments that PUIs do possess unfortunately have seen their rate of return on these investments plummet recently. A recent NACUBO report of 802 colleges and universities showed that the rate of return on endowments for FY18 was 8.2% as compared to 12.2% in FY17. The NACUBO report also points out that 10 year annual return rate increased by 1.2% in 2018 to 5.8% overall, however, this fall short of the average annual return rate of 7.2% targeted by institutions.¹ Because of this, higher education institutions are under pressure to raise spend rates on their endowment earned income to cover operational costs to service their students and to continue their mission of instruction.

Since most PUIs and other larger higher education institutions are reluctant to raise their spending rates on their endowments for fear of hurting the amount of their returns. PUIs are increasingly looking to diversify their revenue streams with research because of the federal funding dollars that they can receive through sponsored program grants. PUIs

¹ NACUBO, 2019

actively seek a multitude of funding opportunities they can receive that will help relieve budget constraints by funding new laboratory space, equipment, salaries, etc. Indirect cost rates received on these sponsored projects help to cover the administrative costs necessary to properly fund the efforts needed to support the efforts of researchers by means of seeking funding opportunities, budget preparation, accounting, compliance, etc.

1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of this research study is to understand the current structure of sponsored project offices at PUIs as compared to the study done in 1988 by Sharon Davis on the same subject.

The survey questions were designed to help clarify the current ability for sponsored project offices at PUIs to administer sponsored projects according to external funding agency guidelines. The following research questions will be investigated:

1. Has the investment into sponsored project offices at PUIs improved since the 1988 article by Sharon Davis on the same subject?
2. Is the current structure of sponsored project offices at PUIs producing the same amount of output in terms of number of active sponsored projects administered and number of sponsored projects submitted for funding in comparison to the 1988 study?
3. What is the feeling of research administrators at PUIs regarding the level of investment of management gives to the sponsored project office?
4. What are the primary needs of research administrator professionals working in PUIs to improve efficiency, decrease workloads, and ensure compliance regarding sponsored projects?

1.3 Objectives

The objective of this research study is to collect information describing the current environment of sponsored project offices at PUIs to understand if management investment into these support functions is sufficient to meet the compliance and regulatory requirements imposed by external funding agencies. The data collected from this study will be compared against similar data collected by Sharon Davis in 1988 to see how investment in sponsored project offices at PUIs have evolved in the thirty years since Davis' study was conducted.

1.4 Significance

Conducting research at PUIs is different than at large research-intensive institutions. The primary mission of PUIs is to train and provide instruction to primarily undergraduate students. Because of this, faculty at PUIs are faced with time constraints to conduct research because of heavy course loads that faculty at PUIs carry. In order to conduct research, faculty must have the support from management to conduct research by giving research administrators the resources needed to assist faculty researchers in administering sponsored projects.

In order to fully support faculty in their research endeavors, research administrators provide researchers with valuable services that include; search for funding opportunities, budget creation, accounting services, compliance and regulatory oversight, etc. These services help support researchers by allowing them to focus and spend more time conducting research rather than conducting administrative tasks. The most important significance to understand with administering sponsored projects at PUIs is to understand that regardless of whether the research takes place at a large R1 rated research institution

or whether it takes place at a small PUI with less than 1,000 FTE student enrollment, the rules and regulations required for conducting sponsored project administration are the same. The difference is the PUIs ability to handle the considerable costs associated with administering sponsored projects.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 Sharon Davis 1988 Study

The study done by Sharon Davis in 1988 appeared in the Fall 1988 edition of the Research Management Review Journal presented by the National Council of Research Administrators (NCURA)². Davis' study researched how PUIs with a small volume of sponsored projects encouraged research, how external funding was procured and how the programs were administered once awarded. Because of the small nature of PUIs and the fact that these institutions' mission is not centered on research, rather they are centered around instruction and training, the data Davis collected on the research function at PUIs was limited. The data collected in Davis' study consisted of basic demographic information from roughly 78 respondents at PUIs. Examples (not all-inclusive) of data collected include:

1. Size of institution in terms of FTE student enrollment
2. Size and number of sponsored projects proposed and actively administered during the year.
3. Number of FTE professionals working in the sponsored project offices
4. Amount of annual budget awarded by management to the sponsored project office.

The significance of comparing these similar data sets vs models is to understand how the structure, support and investment in sponsored project offices at PUIs has evolved in the 30 years since Davis' study came out. Unfortunately for PUIs, the federal government requires the same amount of regulation and oversight of the use of federal

² Davis, S. (1988). Research Administration at Predominately Undergraduate Institutions with a Small Volume of Sponsored Programs.

funds as those at large R1 rated research institutions regardless of the size of the federal award. Recent attempts to simplify the compliance regulations over sponsored projects have occurred for example in the creation of the Office of Management and Budget's Uniform Guidance that seeks to streamline the funding requirements of the various federal funding agencies such as NSF and NIH into one set of rules that are uniform to help research administrators better comply with federal regulations over sponsored projects.

The level of investment that management at PUIs place in their sponsored project offices varies depending on several factors such as, size of institution, size of research portfolio, financial stability of the institution, etc. As mentioned in previous sections, PUIs, in general, are smaller and less research oriented than large R1 rated research institutions. In Davis' study describing the investment those in a management role at PUIs make in their sponsored project office, 44% of the respondents reported that they did not have a full-time professional working in the sponsored projects office. 32% of the respondents reported that they employ at least one full-time professional to administer the PUIs sponsored projects³. Davis concluded that management, based on the data collected, was reluctant to invest in professional research administrators. This statement was made in 1988, the goal of this study, conducted in 2019 seeks to find out if this conclusion remains the same, improved, or worsened in the thirty years since Davis' study was released. The significance of this statement is crucial to understanding the future of research and research administration at PUIs.

2.2 PUI Structure

³ Davis, S. (1988). Research Administration at Predominately Undergraduate Institutions with a Small Volume of Sponsored Programs.

PUIs are first and foremost institutions of instruction for undergraduate students. Faculty at PUIs are concerned mostly with instruction. Because of this, faculty at PUIs often have heavy course-loads that do not allow for or make it difficult to obtain course release time to conduct research. Before discussing the structure of PUIs and how it fits within the conduct of research, it is important to understand what a PUI is. To do this we will use the NSF's definition of a PUI that they use to distinguish qualifications for funding. The definition is as follows:

“U.S. two-year, four-year, masters-level, and small doctoral colleges and universities that (1) grant baccalaureate degrees in NSF-supported fields, or provide programs of instruction for students pursuing such degrees with institutional transfers (e.g., two-year schools), (2) have undergraduate enrollment exceeding graduate enrollment, and (3) award an average of no more than 10 Ph.D. or D.Sc. degrees per year in all NSF-supportable disciplines.”⁴

The definition that the NSF gives to PUIs indicates that the mission of PUIs is to serve a majority of undergraduate student population in addition to a smaller number of graduate and Ph.D. students. The service of undergraduate students requires that the PUI faculty focus primarily on teaching. Faculty at R1 institutions often have access to more graduate students and post-doc research assistants to help them with their research which creates more time and space for research faculty at R1 institutions to produce high-quality research publications. Course load demands are also a large factor in creating the time necessary to conduct research. While faculty at R1 institutions may teach 1 to 3 courses per year, faculty at PUIs will generally teach between 6 to 8 courses per year.⁵

⁴ Polito, C. (2013). Performing Research at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions.

⁵ Polito, C. (2013)

2.3 Compliance & Regulatory Environment

Vanderbilt University conducted a study in 2015 that looked at the regulatory and compliance environment that faces higher education. The Vanderbilt study included 13 universities of different sizes. Vanderbilt's study concluded that research personnel in academic departments spent the most time on compliance issues. As seen in table 1 below; 15% of research staff's time is taken up with compliance related work. The next highest was 13% for non-research (academic), followed by 13% for research faculty and 4% for non-research (academic) faculty.⁶

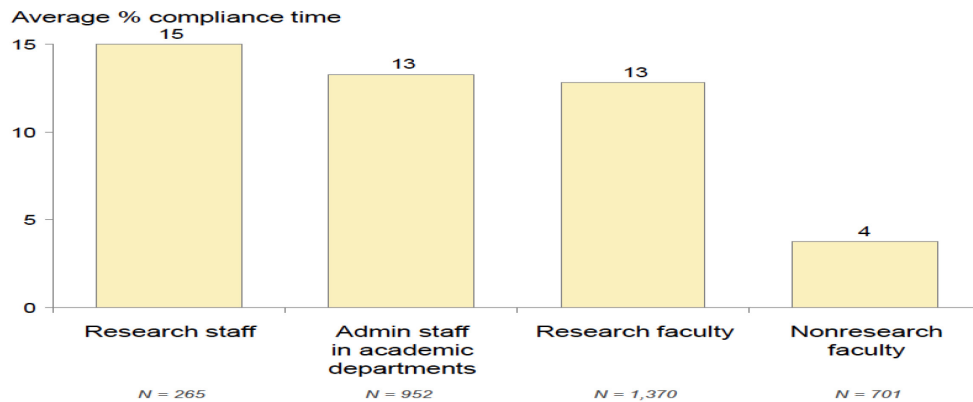


Figure 1

Figure 1 above shows that the research function takes up the most time in terms of compliance as compared to non-research compliance requirements. Since the Vanderbilt study included 13 institutions of varying sizes, it shows that the burden of research compliance is felt not only at small PUIs, but also at larger research institutions. The impact of figure 1 shows the burden of compliance when comparing the time spent on compliance between research faculty and staff to that of non-research, i.e. academic faculty and staff. For research faculty and staff, a combined 28% is spent on research

⁶ Vanderbilt University (2015). *Federal Regulatory Cost Burden. A Multi-Institutional Study: Overview and Findings*

compliance matters. In contrast, a combined 17% is spent by academic staff and faculty on compliance matters. Since the Vanderbilt study includes both large and small institutions, the data in figure 1 indicates the disparity in average compliance time between research and academic compliance, where research compliance consumes on average more time for faculty and staff.

2.4 Management Investment in PUI Sponsored Project Offices

Many PUIs have turned to research as a way to diversify their revenue streams. Because of this management at PUIs desire their researchers and research administrators to submit more proposals and for more federal funding to be secured. While this goal is required to build the research function at the PUI, management need to understand the requirements and difficulties involved in meeting this goal. According to the 2017 Higher Education Research & Development Survey (HERD) conducted by the NSF, 644 institutions surveyed who expended more than \$150,000 of federal R&D expenditures, the top 4% of institutions surveyed received 40% of the funding⁷. Because the PUIs lack the resources to compete with larger research institutions, landing large NSF or other federal agency funding is made more difficult, which makes investing in research and research administration even more important if the PUI wants to remain competitive for future funding. Factors such as lower credibility, lack of research administration personnel, physical infrastructure, etc. all play a factor in federal funding distribution⁸.

⁷ National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. (2018). *Higher Education R&D Expenditures, ranked by FY 2017 R&D expenditures: FYs 2008-17*

⁸ Niles, S. M. (2016). *Environmental change and adaptation in Kentucky emerging research institution sponsored programs offices*.

Scott Niles conducted a study of sponsored project offices at emerging research institutions in Kentucky. His study included communications with several research administrators at PUIs in which he asked about the level of support they receive from management into their sponsored project offices. According to one research administrator at Appalachian State when asked about management views on research administration, the research administrator replied “leadership wasn’t really interested in the compliance side. A lot of focus went on the fact that we have all this money, but not on what’s really the repercussions of not managing it correctly⁹.”

⁹ Niles, S. M. (2016).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology, Data Analysis, and Discussion

3.1 Problem Statement

Management at PUIs are under more pressure than ever to bring in more revenue, whether it be traditional student tuition and fees, investment income from endowments, sponsorships and donations to help fund capital campaigns, scholarships and other related items. Because of tight budgets and thin margins to meet operational needs, management at PUIs are constantly looking for ways to raise money and to provide budget relief. Research provides an avenue to accomplish both of these goals. However, in order to realize the most benefit from federally sponsored research projects, management at PUIs are often tempted to cut investment in support costs. Cutting support in terms of personnel and financial investment in sponsored project offices carries a risk of audit findings, loss of future federal funding, and loss of public support for research being conducted at the PUI.

The intent of this thesis study is to compare the structure of sponsored project offices at PUIs against the study done in 2019 against a similar study done in 1988. It is hoped that this study will lead to an understanding of how management at PUIs are currently investing institutional funds in their research administration offices to support not only the research faculty conducting the research, but also to show commitment to meeting the administrations requirements of conducting research using external funds.

3.2 Research Methodology

3.2.1 Author Experience – This study will examine the support and performance of sponsored project offices at PUIs by comparing a similar study on sponsored project office structures in 1988 with similar information collected on sponsored project office

structures in 2019. The study will examine similarities or differences that exist in sponsored project offices structures at PUIs in the thirty years since the original study was done and what we can learn from it in regard to the evolution of sponsored project administration efforts.

3.2.2 Survey – The data for this study was collected through a survey distributed to listservs of research administrators at PUIs. The listservs that the survey was distributed to were as follows:

1. NCURA Collaborate – Primarily Undergraduate Institutions Community
2. CLASP – Colleges of Liberal Arts Sponsored Project discussion group.

The survey questions were divided into two sections and consisted of a total of 14 questions. The first section was devised to gather information on the current demographics of the PUI sponsored project offices. These demographics include size of the institution in terms of FTE students, number of sponsored projects currently active, amount of annual federal expenditures, size of annual budget for the sponsored project office, etc. The second part of the survey was devised to glean information from the respondents on their thoughts and opinions on the effectiveness of their ability to properly administer the sponsored projects at their institution. Questions were also asked of the respondents to rate the support given to their office by management and to ask what the primary need of their office is to more effectively administer current awards and to procure additional awards in the future.

The survey did not include any required questions so as not to pressure the respondents into answering any questions that they did not feel comfortable in answering. The two listservs mentioned earlier were used to reach as broad of an audience as

possible. It was intention to use these particular listservs because the members of these listservs represent institutions from all regions of the United States so as not to create any regional bias in the survey results. The research and survey were approved through the Johns Hopkins Institutional Review Board (HIRB). The survey questions are listed in Addendum A, the HIRB acknowledgement letter is provided in Addendum B and the survey results are listed in Addendum C.

3.3 Data Analysis

3.3.1 Survey Data – A survey was conducted to understand the current demographics of sponsored project offices at PUIs and to understand if staffing and financial resources are sufficient enough to properly administer sponsored projects. The survey data will be used in comparison to the 1988 study by Sharon Davis on the same subject to draw comparisons between the state of sponsored project office at PUIs in 1988 to those in 2019. There was a total of 75 responses to the survey. The following is a summary of the data collected from the survey:

Question #1 – What is the current size of your institution (in terms of full-time student enrollment)? There was a total of 75 responses to this question. See table 2 below. Question #1 was a multiple-choice question that asks the respondents to indicate the size of their institution based on the range of sizes given in the multiple-choice selections.

What is the current size of your institution (By full-time student enrollment)

75 responses

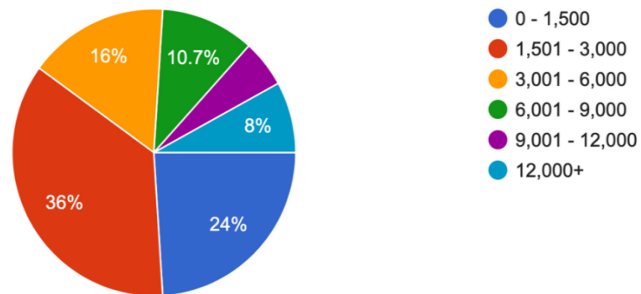


Figure 2

Table 2 above indicates a majority (60%) of the respondents came from institutions in the range of zero to 3,000 full-time student enrollment. 16% came from institutions between 3,001 and 6,000 FTE enrollments, while 8% of respondents came from large PUIs with over 12,000 FTE student enrollments.

Question #2 – How many sponsored projects are currently active at the institution? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and the results are listed in table 3 below.

How many sponsored projects are currently active at the institution?

75 responses

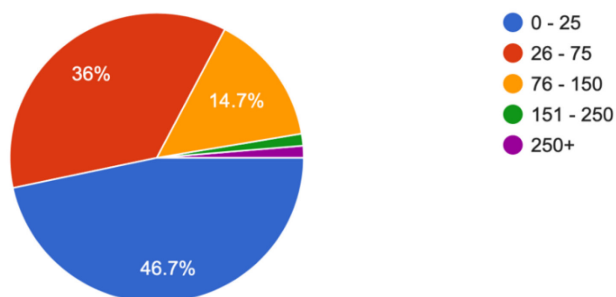


Figure 3

The majority of respondents (83%) had a range of active sponsored projects of between 0 and 75. 15% reported active grants of between 76 and 150. One response was given to each of the ranges of 151-250 and 250+ active awards.

Question #3 – What is the current annual grant expenditures (all grants, i.e. federal, state, private, foundation, etc.)? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and the results can be found in table 4 below.

What is the current annual grant expenditures (All grants, i.e. federal, state, private, foundation, etc.)?

75 responses

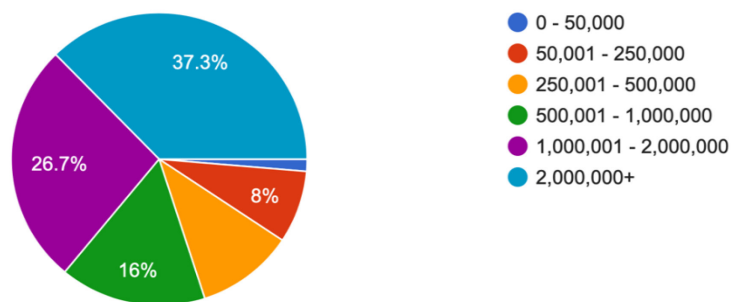


Figure 4

The majority of the responses (64%) indicated that their annual grant expenditures across all award types was greater than \$1million. The largest percentage of respondents (37%) indicated that they spend in excess of \$2million in grant expenditures across all sources of funding, i.e. federal, state, private, foundation, etc.

Question #4 – What is the average size of the active awards at your institution? There was a total of 73 responses to this question and the results can be found in table 5 below.

What is the average size of the active awards at your institution?

73 responses

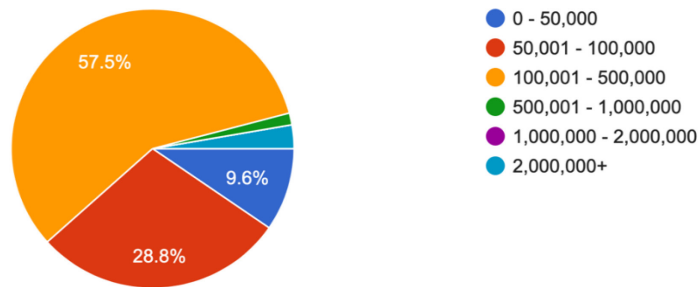


Figure 5

The majority of respondents (58%) indicated that the average size of the active awards at their institution ranges between \$100,000 and \$500,000. The next highest percentage (29%) was in the range of \$50,001 and \$100,000.

Questions #5 – How many proposals are submitted annually by the sponsored projects office? There was a total of 73 responses to this question and the results can be found in table 6 below.

How many proposals are submitted annually by the sponsored projects office?

73 responses

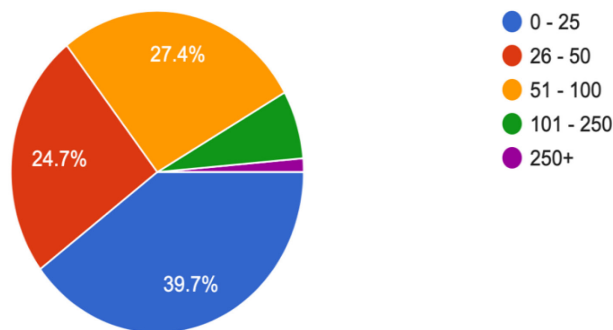


Figure 6

The majority of respondents (64%) reported submitting between 0 and 50 proposals annually. The next highest (27%) submitted between 51 and 100 annually.

Questions #6 – What is the size of the sponsored project office (in terms of FTE's)? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and the results can be seen in table 7 below.

What is the size of the sponsored project office (In terms of FTE's)?

75 responses

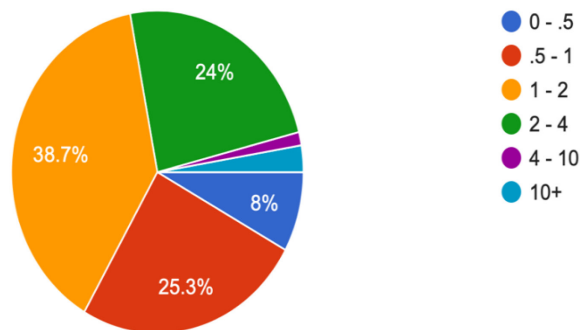


Figure 7

The majority (72%) of respondents reported that their sponsored project offices are staffed between .5 and 2 FTE research administrators performing pre and post-award tasks. 8% reported having less than one FTE in their office. 24% of respondents reported having between 2 and 4 FTE's.

Question #7 – How many current staff in the sponsored project office holds a dual role that serves both the research and non-research function of the institution? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and the results can be seen in table 8 below.

How many current staff in the sponsored projects office hold a dual role that serves both the research and the non-research function of the institution?

75 responses

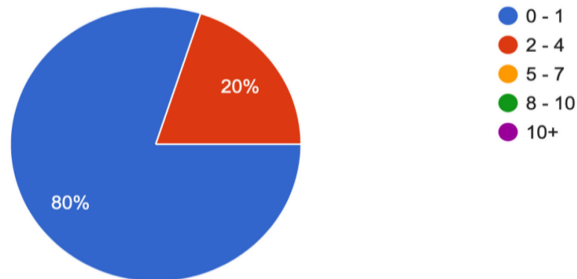


Figure 8

The majority (80%) of respondents indicated that their office has between 0 and 1 staff member that serves a dual role, i.e. splits time between research administration duties and non-research administration-oriented duties.

Question #8 – What is the annual operating budget for the sponsored projects office? There was a total of 74 responses to this question and the results can be seen in table 9 below.

What is the annual operating budget for the sponsored project office?

74 responses

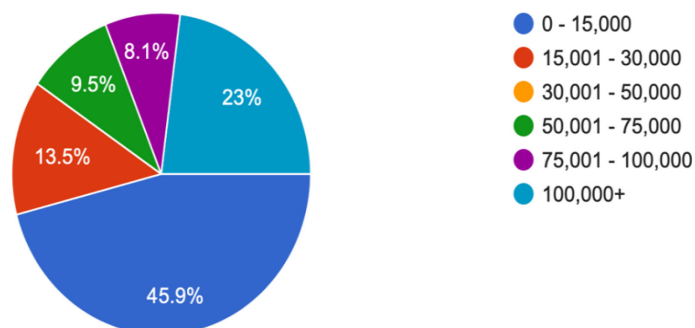


Figure 9

The majority of respondents (46%) reported sponsored projects office annual budget of \$15,000 or less. 23% of respondents reported in excess of \$100,000 for their annual operating budget.

Question #9 – How long has the sponsored project office at your institution been in existence? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and the results can be seen in table 10 below.

How long has the sponsored projects office at your institution been in existence?

75 responses

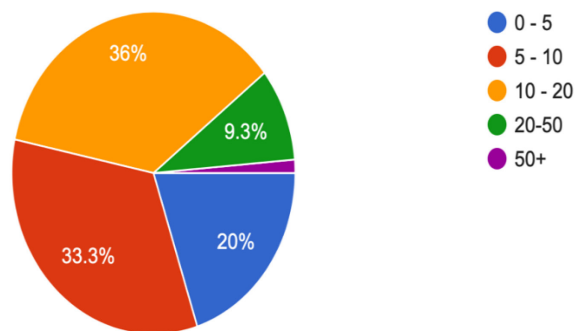


Figure 10

69% of respondents reported that their sponsored projects office has been in existence between 5 and 20 years, 20% reported being in existence 5 years or less.

Question #10 – Who does the sponsored project office report to? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and results can be seen in table 11 below.

Who does the sponsored project office report to?

75 responses

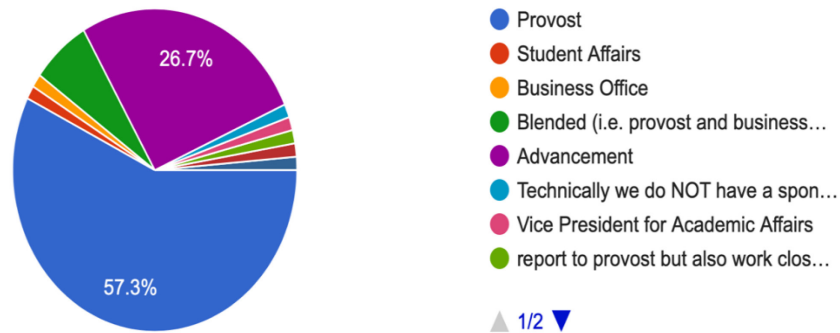


Figure 11

The majority of respondents to this question was split between reporting to the provost (57%) and advancement (27%).

Question #11 – How would you rate the effectiveness of the sponsored project office at your institution to meet the requirements of sponsored project administration? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and the results can be seen in table 12 below.

How would you rate the effectiveness of the sponsored project office at your institution to meet the requirements of sponsored project administration?

75 responses

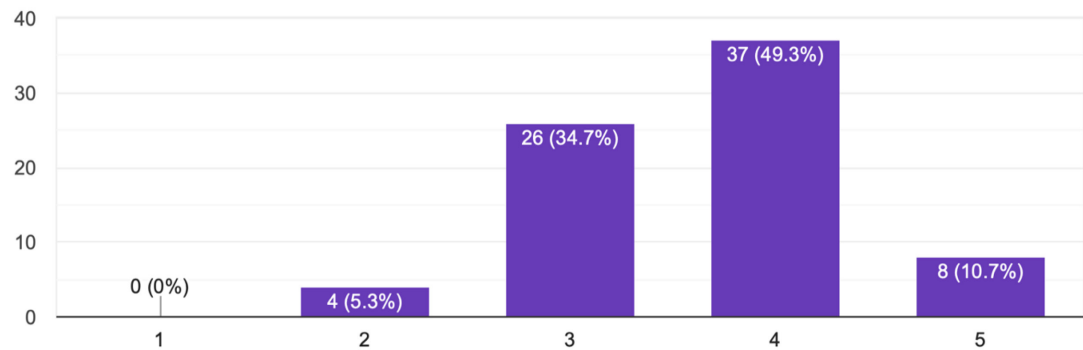


Figure 12

This question asked respondents to respond on a linear scale with 1 being ineffective, 3 being neutral and 5 being effective. The majority of respondents indicated a 4 (49%) on their opinion scale.

Question #12 – How would you rate the support given to the sponsored project office at your institution by management in terms of staffing and funding? There was a total of 75 responses to this question and the results can be seen in table 13 below.

How would you rate the support given to the sponsored projects office at your institution by management in terms of staffing and funding?

75 responses

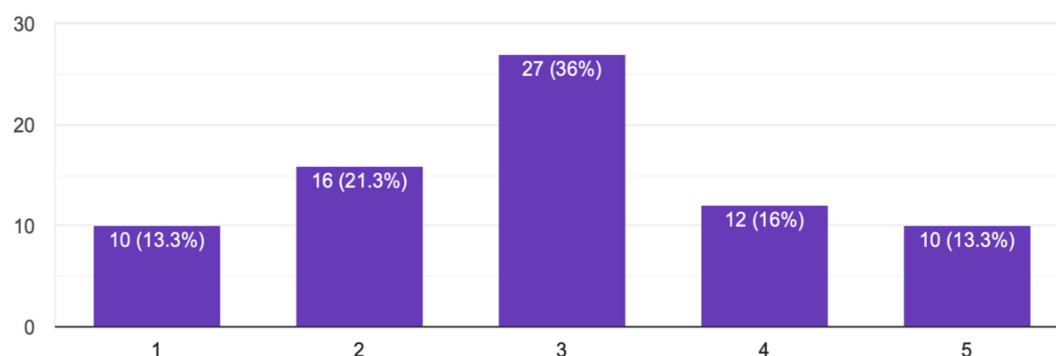


Figure 13

This question asked respondents to respond on a linear scale with 1 being poor, 3 being neutral and 5 being excellent. The majority of respondents (36%) reported neutral feelings of management support to the sponsored project office. 35% of respondents were in the 1-2 range indicating poor satisfaction with management support and 29% were in the 4-5 range indicating excellent satisfaction with management support.

Question #13 – In your opinion, what is the primary need of the sponsored project office at your institution to make it more effective? This was an open-ended opinion question that received 69 responses. Of the 69 responses, 54.5% made reference to more staffing needed, especially on the post-award side. Of the 37 respondents that indicated additional staffing is needed, 8 made specific mention that additional post-award personnel are needed to handle compliance work. Other respondents stated a need for additional resources such as pre-award staff, ERP software or other resources.

Questions #14 – Are there any additional comments you wish to provide? This also was an open-ended question to which there were 19 responses. Not enough meaningful data was collected for this question to include in the analysis of the study.

3.4 Discussion of Data Results and Analysis

3.4.1 Survey Analysis - The information gathered from the survey form a basis from which to analyze and compare to the data from Davis' 1988 study. In total there were 75 respondents to this survey.

The data in the survey's in 1988 and 2019 measure sponsored project office demographics at PUIs. Since the data in both surveys include data from different size institutions (1988 data includes PUIs that are larger in terms of enrollment and annual budget). The main goal of comparing the 1988 and 2019 surveys is to seek an understanding of how staffing levels at PUI sponsored project offices have evolved and whether this evolution of PUI sponsored project offices in the thirty years between the two surveys have increased the output of these offices on a per staff member basis. The main data sets that will be used to analyze this goal will be; 1. Staffing size, 2. Budget size, 3. Active grants administered and 4. Proposals submitted annually.

Before beginning the analysis, a look at the size of the institutions represented in the two surveys is warranted. Figure 14 below is a chart that illustrates the size of the institutions included in both the 1988 survey and the 2019 survey. The size of the institution is determined by the amount of full time equivalent (FTE) students enrolled.

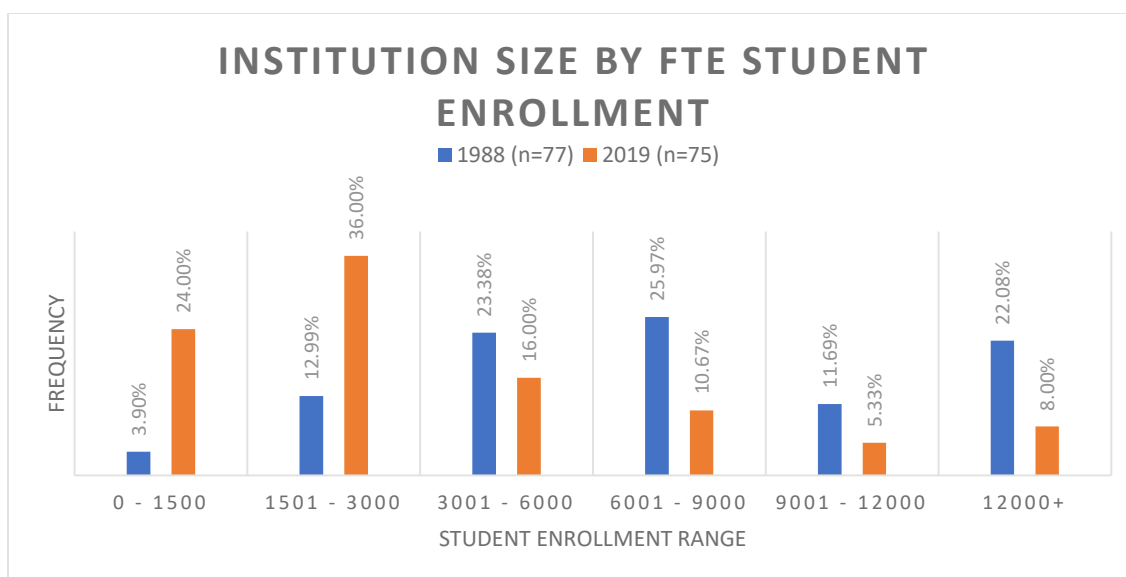


Figure 14

When looking at the raw data from the two survey's in terms of the enrollment size of the institutions surveyed, both survey's include PUIs with small sponsored project research endeavors. The survey from 1988 (marked in blue) include more institutions with higher enrollment than that of the institutions surveyed in 2019 (marked in orange). In comparing the institutions represented in both survey results, the size of the institution by enrollment size is an important aspect to consider for future discussions of sponsored project office budget size, active grants administered, and the number of proposals submitted annually by the sponsored project offices at these PUIs. The conclusion is that the institutions in the 1988 survey are on average larger than those institutions in the 2019 survey and as such an assumption can be made that institutional resources are greater at those institutions in the 1988 survey. Resources such as budget size, staffing size, lab space, and other research related resources can be assumed to be better at these larger institutions.

Figure 15 below is a comparison chart that illustrates that range of annual operating budgets measured in terms of dollars given to the sponsored project offices on an annual basis.

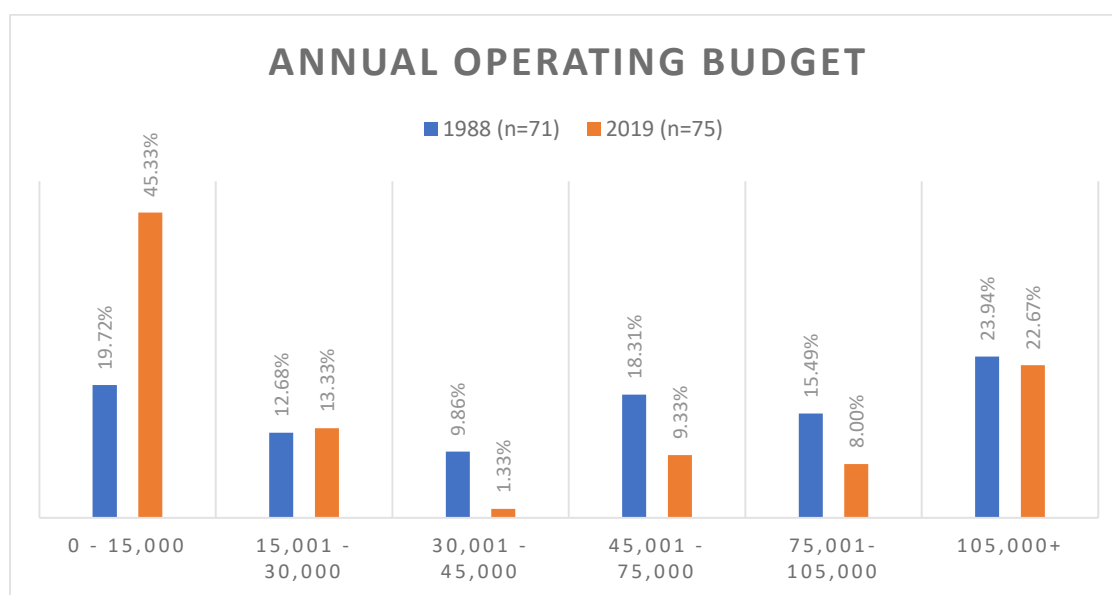


Figure 15

Because of the larger sizes of the institutions represented in the 1988 survey, the range of annual budgets to the sponsored project office appear to be more evenly distributed. This may be due in part because of the wider variety of institution size in the institutions represented in the 1988 survey, where the institutions surveyed in 2019 largely concentrated in the 1500-3000 FTE enrollment range. The dollar ranges are based on the ranges similar to the ranges from the 1988 survey. Indexing these dollar ranges used in the 1988 survey to 2019 for inflation would significantly increase the value of the annual budget for the institutions surveyed in 1988.

Figure 16 below illustrates the number of FTE research administration professionals that were employed in the sponsored project offices included in the 1988 and 2019 surveys.

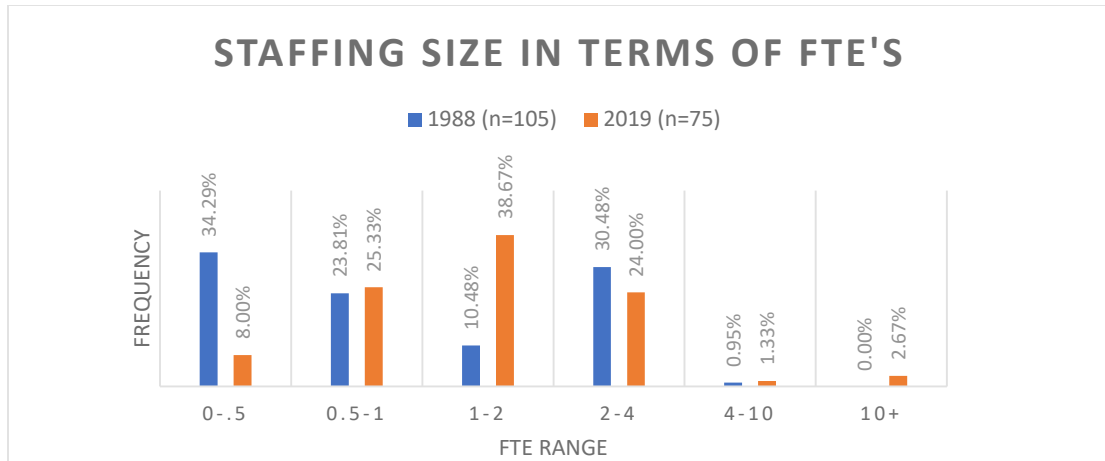
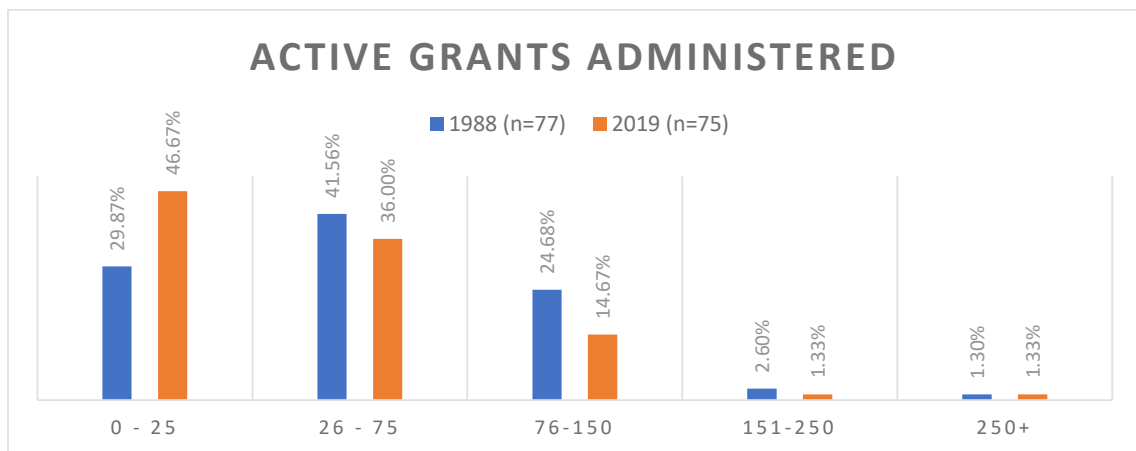


Figure 16

Despite the larger size of the institutions in 1988 in terms of enrollment and annual budget size, the data in figure 16 appears to indicate that the institutions in 2019 despite being smaller in terms of enrollment and annual budget size employed more staff in their sponsored project offices.

Figure 17 below illustrates both active grants administered as well as the proposals submitted on an annual basis by the institutions included in both surveys.



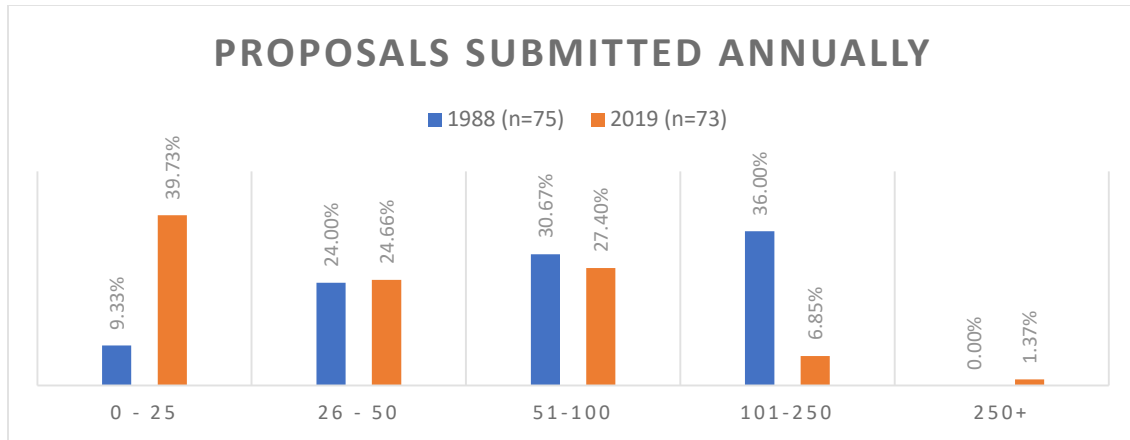


Figure 17

The data in figure 17 above shows that for both active grants administered, and annual proposals submitted by these PUI sponsored project offices are largely equal in terms of their overall output. The significance of the data in figure 18 is that despite the differences in enrollment and staffing size between the two survey's, it appears that the outputs of the sponsored program offices are on average, the same.

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Research Conclusions

Despite the larger institution and budget size in the 1988 survey (which assumes more resources in terms of lab space, equipment, etc.) the number of active and proposals submitted annually did not increase significantly over the institutions in the 2019 survey. While the respondent institutions in 2019 had on average more FTE personnel, they are operating on smaller budgets and were not improving upon the number of active grants and proposals submitted annually over the respondents in the 1988 survey. Reasons for these results could be as follows:

1. Low budgets are an indication of low investment in sponsored project offices by management.
2. PUIs are not taking advantage of modern technology such as ERA software to help automate and mitigate redundant processes, instead they are relying on outdated manual processes to administer sponsored projects.
3. Compliance and regulatory matters involving research administration has grown exponentially since the 1988 survey was conducted.
4. PUIs are facing significant budget crunches that is not allowing investment in sponsored project offices that will yield higher funding and proposals submittal
5. Competition for funding is becoming harder for PUIs to compete for.

4.2 Recommendations

This study found that overall, the larger institutions in the 1988 study were providing more output in terms of active grants administered and proposals submitted using less staff. However, the compliance and regulatory environment is more complicated in 2019

than it was in 1988 which could account for the increase of staff needed to administer the increased burden of compliance and regulatory matters.

Additional factors such as the changing landscape of higher education has also played a role in that decreased enrollments have forced higher education institutions to decrease their budgets and especially with PUIs, rethink their traditional role as a purely teaching institution. Because of this, PUIs should invest more in research functions and provide latitude for faculty to conduct and submit grant proposals for federal, state, and private funding. While this type of funding does not create an additional revenue stream, research funding does provide critical budget relief that will allow PUIs that ability to educate and train future researchers at the undergraduate level.

Regardless of staff size, annual budget or institution size, the critical element of the two study's shows that the output (active grants administered, and proposals submitted annually) of these PUI sponsored project offices has not increased in the thirty years between the two study's. While professional organizations such as NCURA has increased their support of research administration professionals in the U.S. and around the world, there seems to remain a reluctance on the part of senior leadership at PUIs to further invest in sponsored project research. It is my conclusion and recommendation that PUIs would be best served to diversify their educational offerings from that of traditional academic pursuits to include more research. It is also my opinion that doing so will increase the prestige of the institutions, recruit more students interested in research to institutions that often is more affordable than the larger more established research institutions.

While growing the research function at PUIs is warranted, senior leadership at PUIs who decide on increasing their research footprint must also be aware that support of sponsored project administration must be taken into account to properly grow and protect those involved in research at the PUI. Pre-award and post-award functions exist to increase the amount of sponsored project opportunities as well as providing risk-management services to protect the institution from compliance issues, research misconduct, and threats to public support of research by the institution.

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Addendum A

10/1/2019

Evaluation of Sponsored Project Offices at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions

Evaluation of Sponsored Project Offices at Primarily Undergraduate Institutions

Primarily Undergraduate Institutions who engage in research provide a unique service to their institutions. These institutions operate in an environment that is very different from those of large research institutions. As such, research administrators at these primarily undergraduate institutions often times play a dual role between the research function and the non-research instructional mission of primarily undergraduate institutions. This survey seeks to understand the current make up of the sponsored project offices at these primarily undergraduate institutions. The goal of the study is to evaluate if current staffing and funding levels are adequate to meet the increasing level of compliance and regulation required to administer sponsored projects. Jason Cottam, a graduate student at Johns Hopkins University is conducting this survey as part of the thesis requirement for the Masters of Science in Research Administration.

Your participation in this survey is anonymous. Your responses will not be shared. By completing this survey, you are consenting to be in this research study. You may quit the survey at any time. The estimated time to complete the survey is 10 minutes.

1. What is the current size of your institution (By full-time student enrollment)

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0 - 1,500
- ☐ 1,501 - 3,000
- ☐ 3,001 - 6,000
- ☐ 6,001 - 9,000
- ☐ 9,001 - 12,000
- ☐ 12,000+

2. How many sponsored projects are currently active at the institution?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0 - 25
- ☐ 26 - 75
- ☐ 76 - 150
- ☐ 151 - 250
- ☐ 250+

3. What is the current annual grant expenditures (All grants, i.e. federal, state, private, foundation, etc.)?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 0 - 50,000
- ☐ 50,001 - 250,000
- ☐ 250,001 - 500,000
- ☐ 500,001 - 1,000,000
- ☐ 1,000,001 - 2,000,000
- ☐ 2,000,000+

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1DXI2QlixRu2owAjjCr-ye-Qjl1973X38NNpHDxJ3ims/edit>

1/4

4. What is the average size of the active awards at your institution?*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0 - 50,000
- ☐ 50,001 - 100,000
- ☐ 100,001 - 500,000
- ☐ 500,001 - 1,000,000
- ☐ 1,000,000 - 2,000,000
- ☐ 2,000,000+

5. How many proposals are submitted annually by the sponsored projects office?*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0 - 25
- ☐ 26 - 50
- ☐ 51 - 100
- ☐ 101 - 250
- ☐ 250+

6. What is the size of the sponsored project office (In terms of FTE's)?*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0 - .5
- ☐ .5 - 1
- ☐ 1 - 2
- ☐ 2 - 4
- ☐ 4 - 10
- ☐ 10+

7. How many current staff in the sponsored projects office hold a dual role that serves both the research and the non-research function of the institution?*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0 - 1
- ☐ 2 - 4
- ☐ 5 - 7
- ☐ 8 - 10
- ☐ 10+

8. What is the annual operating budget for the sponsored project office?*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0 - 15,000
- ☐ 15,001 - 30,000
- ☐ 30,001 - 50,000
- ☐ 50,001 - 75,000
- ☐ 75,001 - 100,000
- ☐ 100,000+

9. How long has the sponsored projects office at your institution been in existence?*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 0 - 5
- ☐ 5 - 10
- ☐ 10 - 20
- ☐ 20-50
- ☐ 50+

10. Who does the sponsored project office report to?*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Provost
- ☐ Student Affairs
- ☐ Business Office
- ☐ Blended (i.e. provost and business office, etc.)
- ☐ Advancement
- ☐ Other: _____

11. How would you rate the effectiveness of the sponsored project office at your institution to meet the requirements of sponsored project administration?*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Ineffective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Effective

12. How would you rate the support given to the sponsored projects office at your institution by management in terms of staffing and funding?*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Poor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Excellent

13. **In your opinion, what is the primary need of the sponsored project office at your institution to make it more effective?**

14. **Are there any additional comments that you wish to provide?**

Powered by
 Google Forms

Addendum B

10/15/2019

<https://ehirb.jhu.edu/eHIRB/sd/Doc/0/6HBI44OFI43K5237LCPUELUG16/fromString.html>



Homewood Institutional Review Board

3400 N. Charles Street
Wym an Park Building, Suite N 468
Baltimore MD 21218-2685
410-516-6580
<http://homewoodirb.jhu.edu/>

Michael McCloskey, PhD
IRB Chair

Date: October 15, 2019

PI Name: Jeffrey Kantor

Study #: HIRB00010086

Study Name: Evaluation of Sponsored Project Offices at Predominately Undergraduate Institutions.

Date of Review: 10/15/2019

Date of Acknowledgement: 10/15/2019

Expiration Date: 10/15/2022

The above referenced study has been *acknowledged*.

Review Type:	Exempt
Funding Agency:	Not funded
Grant or Contract Number:	
International Sites:	No
Maximum number of participants:	300
Vulnerable populations:	None
Consent process:	
Assent Process:	

No changes may be made to the protocol or the consent form without the approval of the Board.

To keep the Homewood IRB files current, we are assigning an expiration date to projects that qualify as not human subjects research or exempt. You will receive an email notification prior to the expiration date shown above, providing guidance to extend this project.

<https://ehirb.jhu.edu/eHIRB/sd/Doc/0/6HBI44OFI43K5237LCPUELUG16/fromString.html>

1/2

Please keep this message in your files for future reference. Thank you for contacting the Homewood IRB about this research and for providing the requested information to make this determination. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Please keep in mind that it is your responsibility to inform the HIRB of any adverse consequences to participants that occur in the course of the study, as well as any complaints from participants regarding the research. In conducting this research, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the *HIRB Policies and Procedures Manual*.

Study Team Members:
Jason Cottam

APPROVAL IS GRANTED UNDER THE TERMS OF FWA00005834 FEDERAL-WIDE ASSURANCE OF COMPLIANCE WITH DHHS REGULATIONS FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Addendum C

Sponsored Project Offices at PUI's *All changes saved in Drive*



QUESTIONS

RESPONSES 75

75 responses



Not accepting responses ☐

Message for respondents

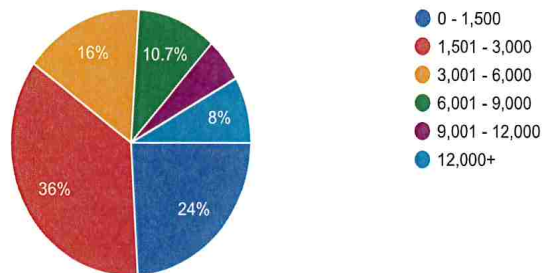
This form is no longer accepting responses

SUMMARY

INDIVIDUAL

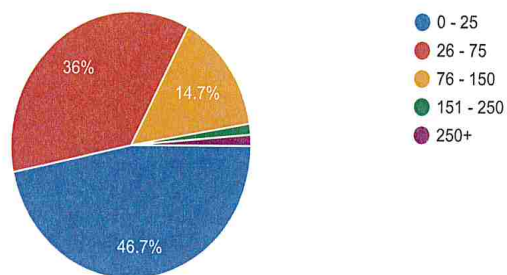
What is the current size of your institution (By full-time student enrollment)

75 responses



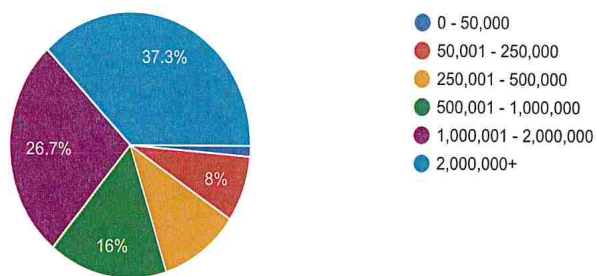
How many sponsored projects are currently active at the institution?

75 responses



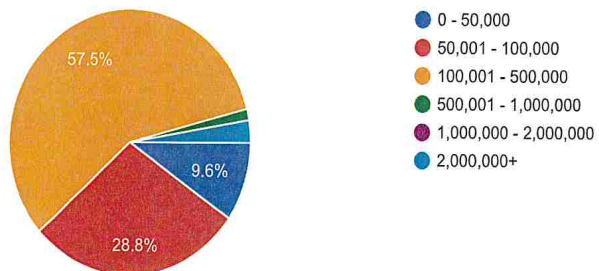
What is the current annual grant expenditures (All grants, i.e. federal, state, private, foundation, etc.)?

75 responses



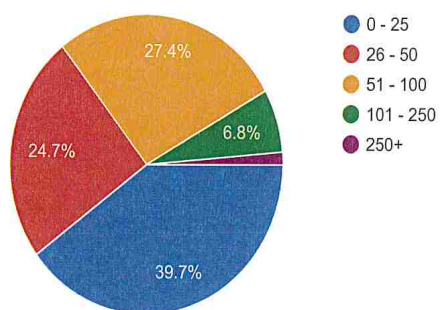
What is the average size of the active awards at your institution?

73 responses



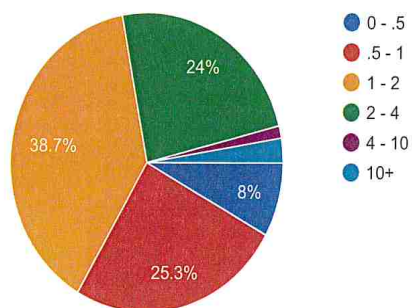
How many proposals are submitted annually by the sponsored projects office?

73 responses



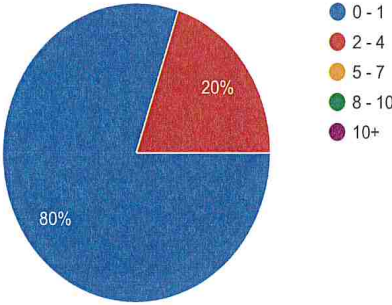
What is the size of the sponsored project office (In terms of FTE's)?

75 responses



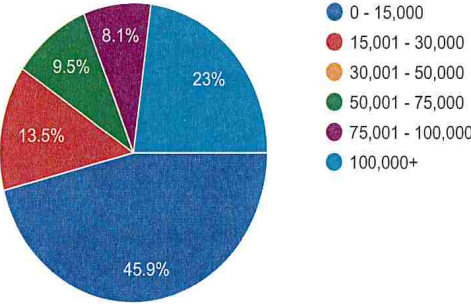
How many current staff in the sponsored projects office hold a dual role that serves both the research and the non-research function of the institution?

75 responses



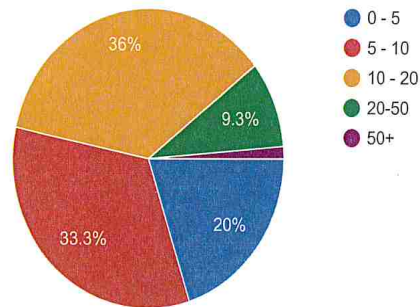
What is the annual operating budget for the sponsored project office?

74 responses



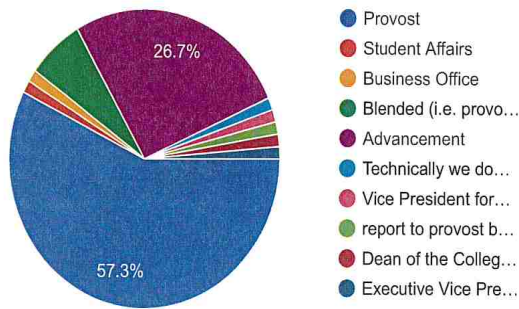
How long has the sponsored projects office at your institution been in existence?

75 responses



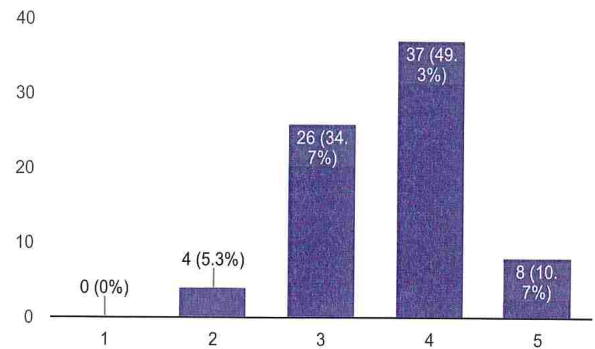
Who does the sponsored project office report to?

75 responses



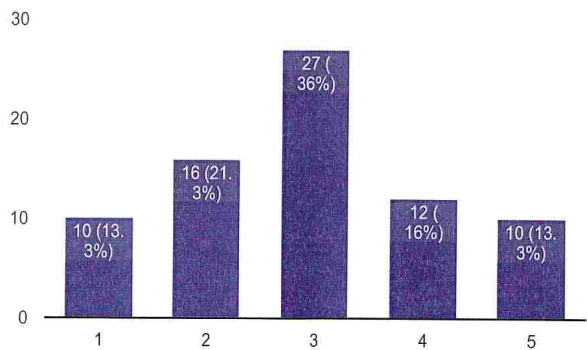
How would you rate the effectiveness of the sponsored project office at your institution to meet the requirements of sponsored project administration?

75 responses



How would you rate the support given to the sponsored projects office at your institution by management in terms of staffing and funding?

75 responses



In your opinion, what is the primary need of the sponsored project office at your institution to make it more effective?

69 responses

Dedicated post-award personnel (currently have an accountant with multiple roles)

Additional staffing

more personnel

Time to do some strategic planning

more well defined policies, systems, and processes that everyone is willing to abide by

More faculty engaged in seeking grants

Replace the third staff member.

More faculty to write grants

easier communication methods-perhaps online collaborative workspaces

It needs to be formally established as an entity functioning separately from gifts/development, but still working WITH the development team.

increased funding to support additional staff or to hire consultants to assist with projects

some type of peer review to help ensure that the institution is in compliance across all divisions of grants administration

more staffing

Full time person dedicated solely to the role

More support for the value of grant in P&T

training/federal proposal experience

eRA

more cross campus cooperation

Better integration into the wider university

Too new in office to respond

Resources

Personnel

Structure/Metrics

Take away the non-sponsored project duties.

We currently perform all Post-Award duties except for the actual drawdown. In order to do so effectively, we should have another staff member or transfer Financial Post-Award duties to the Finance Office.

Increased staffing to assist with PI training, proposal development, and project management

an electronic IRB system

training

Support from administration

We need a Grants Coordinator (handle compliance monitoring and administrative duties, e.g. maintain grants database, etc.)

Funding

More staff would increase our capacity; more incentives for faculty to apply for grants would increase applications.

Grant management system

More support of research development activities.

more person power; dedicated grant accountant

More time :)

Additional post-award resources.

Additional staff to handle administrative details.

Increased wages, benefits, and personnel

Training in administration and increased staffing

An online database to store our records

More comprehensive research strategy for building grants

Ability to encourage a culture of grant writing amongst faculty. Right now our efforts are on private foundations and large grants for institutional priority.

More institutional authority for decision making.

Additional power and authority over post award operations and implementation

Additional staffing (1-2) people

more staff, specifically for pre-award

Additional FTE

Increase in operating budget

Cooperation with other units to streamline the grant process (in particular purchasing dept).

a dedicated grants accountant in the business office

Greater push from administration for research and pursuing grant opportunities

Staff who are dedicated ONLY to SPO, rather than spreading time around to multiple offices.

Buy-in from leadership has been crucial. More dedicated staff to FT sponsored research/federal grant support would help us to improve our current operation.

Improve faculty motivation to conduct research.

Additional staffing, increased operational budget, seed funding

Database and more staff

Strategic vision and guidance from leadership above our OSP - what is the overall role and goal of our office in the institutional context? (we have our own mission and goals but not guided by a higher strategic plan).

A second post award administrator

Increased staff, training, and funding

Formalization, first and foremost!

Dedicated staff to post-award management (monitoring of expenditures, monitoring of outgoing subawards); recognition of importance of compliance on the part of leadership

Increased support from Business Affairs for compliance.

administrative support – but a common problem for all of Academic Affairs

Stronger connections to the academic division

more FTE

Are there any additional comments that you wish to provide?

19 responses

loss of institutional knowledge is the most critical issue in keeping everything running and growing the institution's grant profile

We are a pre- and post- award office.

We have a cross-departmental approach to sponsored projects. That terminology (sponsored projects) is not even utilized here regularly because the institution is new to grants. My job has been to educate (bring in that language) and try to shape culture. It is a slow process. Answers above in terms of staff, budget etc. are based on the fact my position is exclusive to sponsored projects/grants management, but was created without formally establishing a distinguished SPO.

Proposals are submitted through 2 offices, sponsored projects being one of them.

R1 or PUI, when you accept federal funds the compliance requirements are the same and PUIs must be prepared to make the investment in their sponsored research offices.

My answers might not be as applicable to what you're looking for, since we have an Office of Sponsored Projects at a system level, and I answered the questions from that perspective. All four institutions in the system are primarily undergraduate, but one is a community college and one is a technical college, so we don't have that many research grants (about 10%). The Office of Sponsored Projects has only existed for one year; before that, each institution handled its own grants.

Grants are not seen as integrated here; they are considered 'extra.'

The office has been given additional responsibilities without additional staff and other resources. We do a lot with very little.

I found some of the questions to be less than clear. How do you define staffing for sponsored projects? There are two of us, but research compliance is a separate office. Yet, I know research compliance is part of some sponsored project offices. So that may throw your numbers off. I also wasn't clear what a "non-research function" was. I didn't include salary in our operating budget, as at our institution that a separate budget.

"Average size of award" is not really a good data point for small PUIs like ours that have everything from \$500 awards to \$15 million dollar grants pass through our doors.

As a 1-person shop overseeing sponsored programs (and foundation relations) including all compliance & a summer undergraduate research program, I feel drastically understaffed and concerned regarding compliance holes. So far my pleas for further help have fallen on deaf ears due to financial concerns of the institution despite arguments that assistance would be revenue generating.

Our institution is fairly typical, in that the early years of the SPO were focused on pre-award and helping faculty secure grants. As it matured it caught up with compliance and related issues.

No

Our office combined pre and post in 2012. We include financial post award. It was a good move and has had positive results. Our office also includes Compliance (IRB, IACUC, Tech Transfer etc). I did not include that person in the FTE account above.

Note: the operating budget reflects employee salaries. Without this, our budget would likely be below \$15,000.

no

We don't technically have a sponsored programs office. We have a Director of Grants and Foundations (full-time) and a Post-Award Grants Administrator (half-time). The director of grants reports to Advancement and the post-award administrator reports to the VP of Finance and Administration. A budget specifically for sponsored programs activities does not exist at this time.

Our institution does not have a formal SPO. We are a hybrid mix of 2 FTE that focus on external grants generally. We have a small amount of sponsored projects that we support in tandem with our Finance/Controller's Office.

You question on expenditures didn't have a high enough range. We avg ~ \$5M/yr

You question on staffing didn't specify pre or post award. I assumed you meant pre-award based on other questions. The post award (grants accounting) is also sometimes considered part of Sponsored Projects. I hope you will share results.

Biography

Jason Cottam received his Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting from Peru State College in 2012. He worked as a staff accountant in a small public accounting firm for eight years gaining professional certification as an Enrolled Agent in 2008. During his time in public accounting, he gained valuable experience in taxation, estate planning, auditing and bookkeeping. After leaving public accounting, he worked for two years in private industry as a controller before joining Doane University in 2015. His initial duties at Doane upon hiring was that of assistant controller. In this capacity he was responsible for the daily accounting function of the University as well as assisting with the preparation of audited financial statements and preparation of the annual form 990. In 2017 he was promoted to the newly created position of Director of Budget & Post-Award Grant Administration at Doane. In this capacity he became responsible for the creation and upkeep of Doane's budget function as well as overseeing the post-award function of Doane's sponsored project portfolio. His current responsibilities include refining the budgetary process as well as the compliance process of Doane.